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STREETVIBES \$1

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May They Finally Rest in Peace

Albert Ollie

John Graham

David "Peaches" Bryant

James Arnold

"Gary"

Ken McClure

Derek Gibson

Fanni Edwards

Daniel Byrum

Joseph Wright

Ken Tucker

George Cannon

Scott Wheeler

Eddie Seamon

Matthew Harmeyer

Bob Carle

Jessie Frank

Dorris Dawson

Frank Roper

Rodney Sosby

Eric Smothers

Eugene Burgess

Anthony Wright...

the unknown and the unnamed

Photo by Almie Willhoite.

Remembering homeless people who died in 2009

By PAUL KOPP
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Homelessness often carries a stigma in mainstream culture. It seems that those who are homeless have lost their voice in society. Though they suffer from problems similar to those who judge them, they are ridiculed for their mistakes and viewed as a lesser class.

The differences between an average middle-class person and a homeless person are sometimes few. It is sometimes a matter of chance, luck, family history, unforeseen health conditions, etc. The element of choice and free will, things we can control, might seem to debase this argument but one must remember that one bad choice can carry massive repercussions. Many homeless lives end in tragedy, tragedies that most never know about.

The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless held its annual observance Dec. 21 in Washington Park for homeless people who died in 2009. A fire inside a trash bin symbolized the struggle that homeless people go through to keep themselves warm in the cold winter months. Following a moment of silence to commemo-

rate the individuals who lost their lives, those attending the ceremony were given a chance to say a few words about those who died.

Rob Goeller, civil-rights outreach coordinator for the Homeless Coalition, compiled a list of the homeless or formerly homeless

people who died last year:

Ken McClure: In addition to living in the neighborhood, McClure worked in maintenance for Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH) for a number of years.

He died of complications from cancer, with his family by his side.

"He was a great guy," says Amy Silver, a social worker for OTRCH. "He was friendly, warm, reliable, laid back and patient. He was older and he lived a really long life. He worked up right up until before he died."

Fanni Edwards came to Cincinnati from Kentucky when she was 17 and was "on her own and feisty ever since," Silver says.

A long-time resident of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, she was in her early 90s. When her health failed, she moved to a nursing home.

"She was always fighting, always staying alive," Silver says. "She

See **Peace**, p. 5

Metropole Tenants Gain Support

But what went wrong at the 'alternative' newspaper?

By GREGORY FLANNERY
EDITOR

Low-income tenants who want to keep their homes in the Metropole Apartments downtown have support from an impressive array of progressive organizations.

The Cincinnati Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People passed resolutions Dec. 17 supporting the Metropole Tenants Association and

condemning the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC), which has purchased the building. 3CDC is forcing residents to move so it can turn the Metropole into a boutique hotel.

The Metropolitan Area Religious Coalition of Cincinnati has written the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), supporting the tenant association's complaint alleging

See **Metropole**, p. 5



Robert Wavra from the Metropole Tenants Association. Tenants have been working to build community support to save their homes. NAACP pledged its support on Dec. 17, 2009. Photo by Clarissa Peppers.

By The Numbers

8th

Cincinnati's ranking in a list of most segregated urban areas in the United States (see page 1).

1943

the year that women successfully used non-violence to save Jews from the Nazis (see page 2).

4,452

the number of people reached by the speakers bureau of the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless (see page 10).

25

the cost, in dollars, of a membership in Affordable Housing Advocates (see page 14).

350

the number of guests who enjoyed Thanksgiving dinner at Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services (see page 13).

3 to 4

the servings, measured in "fairly hungry bellies," created by a recipe for Chipotle Veggie Philly (see page 8).

3

the age at which a child named Precious first endured her father's sexual abuse (see page 9).

29

the percentage of people tested by Stop AIDS who are infected by hepatitis C (see page 4).

08-4499

the file number of a case in which federal judges supported prisoners' rights (see page 3).

Streetwise

By GREGORY FLANNERY
EDITOR

Bad Words are a Matter of Perspective

The parishioners at St. Mary Church in Hyde Park have been generous toward *Streetvibes* over the years. But we have apparently offended one of them, and now our vendors will pay the price. The parish last month sent a letter saying our vendor may no longer stand on the church steps with the pastor after Mass. Nor will the pastor urge parishioners to buy *Streetvibes*.

This is because a single parishioner complained of "coarse language" in *Streetvibes* and "the political nature of the content," saying he wouldn't want his young children to read such material.

We love children. We hope there are always children and that each of them is happy, healthy and loved. But no, *Streetvibes* **isn't written for children**. Homelessness, poverty, oppression, racism and war are beyond the ken of children. May it ever be so! We remain grateful to adults – Catholics, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Wiccans, atheists and agnostics – who buy *Streetvibes* and support our homeless and formerly homeless vendors. If our language is sometimes coarse, that's a reflection of the fact that life can be coarse.

Language is inevitably political, reflecting the values of those who use it. Consider the article that Cliff Radel wrote about a Hamilton County assistant prosecutor in the Nov. 27 edition of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The story, which led that day's edition, told of the tenacity with which Anita Vizedom advocates on behalf of crime victims. Her zeal, Radel wrote, stems from the fact that Vizedom and her family experienced the trauma of violent crime when three of her relatives were stabbed to death. One cannot read the article without being moved by the tragic loss that Vizedom's family endured or admiring her determination to protect others from experiencing the same suffering.

But Radel's tribute goes beyond empathy and admiration. His paean to the pursuit of justice perverts the meaning of the concept. Radel works himself into a lather, describing Vizedom "as she gets ready to question **a piece of evil on the witness stand.**"

A piece of evil? Reporters have access to many words to describe someone who is on trial: "defendant," "accused," "suspect," "prisoner."

Piece of evil?

The presumption of innocence for a person charged with a crime is a hallmark of democratic governance, an essential principle that is too easily and too often laid aside as we struggle to deal with crime. The *Enquirer's* blithe disregard for this principle is more than mere pandering to the crowd; it is patently anti-democratic. Whether the language is too coarse for children, persons more religious than we will have to decide. But we think "the political nature of the content" is coarse and offensive.

Obama Should Look to Indianapolis

The conservatives who blasted the choice of President Barack Obama as recipient of the Nobel Peace prize were wrong – until he proved them right. Obama's election gave hope that the people of the United States had rejected the Bush regime's aggressive military policies. Then **Obama shamed the prize** by using his acceptance speech to defend escalation of the U.S. war on Afghanistan. The ill-begotten war, launched eight years ago against a country that had not attacked the United States, will grow still more bloody with Obama's decision to send another 30,000 troops. Steve Sunderland, whose inspiring column returns to *Streetvibes* with this edition after a year's absence, contrasts Obama's embrace of aggressive war with the non-violent message of earlier Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. (see page 7.)

Perhaps most unfortunate is Obama's reference to the Nazi terror as proof that sometimes war is justified and violence is a moral act. Adolf Hitler is the quintessential historical example cited by people who insist that good people sometimes must take up arms. But what Obama and others ignore is the fact that non-violence, did, in fact stop the Nazis on the few occasions it was tried. In 1943, at the height of the Holocaust, the SS seized German Jews who were married to non-Jewish German women in Berlin. The wives gathered outside the building and mounted a non-violent protest that grew for the course of a week, yelling, "Murderers!" at the SS and police. Hitler capitulated, ordering more than 1,700 imprisoned Jews released. He even ordered the release of 35 who were already in Auschwitz. The men survived to the end of the war.

Non-violence works, and Obama need not have looked back 65 years for evidence. Consider the case of Angela Montez, a clerk at a check-cashing business in Indianapolis who was confronted by an armed robber in late October last year. A security camera caught the crime on tape, and for a few days it captivated the nation. Terrified, Montez managed to reason with the robber, getting him to talk about his motivation. (Unemployed, broke, his family was facing eviction). *She got him to lay down his gun* and even to kneel with her in prayer. After half an hour in the presence of this gentle, clear-headed woman, the robber left the scene, leaving Montez unharmed and eventually surrendering to police. That is the kind of behavior that the Nobel Peace Prize was meant to honor.

Streetvibes is an activist newspaper, advocating justice and building community. *Streetvibes* reports on economic issues, civil rights, the environment, the peace movement, spirituality and the struggle against homelessness and poverty. Distributed by people who are or once were homeless, in exchange for a \$1 donation, *Streetvibes* is published twice a month by the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless.

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8 MINUTES

in the
Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals
A law student argues in federal court – and wins

By MARGO PIERCE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The question addressed: To what extent must the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) protect inmates from each other?

The partial answer: Already established is the fact that a credible death threat requires prison officials to take steps to protect an inmate who is at risk. But a new ruling clarifies the threshold for what defines a credible threat and reduces the “gray area” for making a decision.

The significance of the ruling: “It doesn’t stand for some novel change in the law, but it does push the envelope of deliberate indifference,” says Brett Renzenbrink, a law student who on Aug. 6, 2009, successfully argued case number 08-4499 before the U.S. Sixth Circuit of Appeals.

After George Hamilton received a death threat in 2004 and requested protective cus-

tody (keeping an inmate out of the general population), an ODRC employee named Jack Bendolph made the decision to transfer him to the Warren Correctional Institute and put him in the general population. As an inmate there, he was beaten so severely by a group of inmates who belonged to the Aryan Brotherhood that he almost died. According to some accounts, he flat-lined before reaching the hospital.

“The right at issue here is the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, which among other things requires prison officials to ‘take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of the inmates,’ ” the Sixth Circuit ruled. “Bendolph testified he knew that the Aryan Brotherhood exists throughout the Ohio prison system and that their ‘hits’ could follow a prisoner from one prison to another. A jury could certainly find, therefore, that Bendolph was aware of facts from which he could have inferred that Hamilton faced a

substantial risk of serious harm.”

The court ruled that, by ignoring the fact of Hamilton’s situation, Bendolph acted with deliberate indifference, resulting in the beating that left him with mental-health problems, irreparable damage to his sight and hearing and loss of the ability to taste.

While it’s true that someone who commits a crime forfeits some rights when s/he goes to prison, there are other basic human rights that aren’t suspended. For a system of justice to work, these fundamental rights must be protected, and that’s why Renzenbrink is proud of his involvement with Hamilton’s case.

“It’s about taking care of and preserving the system of justice as it was designed to be. ... In the end, that’s what I feel should be protected – what the system was built on,” Renzenbrink says. “I think the system should work the way it was theoretically designed; and when it messes up, there should be consequences.

“These people are human beings. There’s no court in the United States or Ohio that, because someone is put into prison, says we throw away the key and whatever they do to each other is fine. But that also doesn’t mean that people who have been convicted of any offense – from a petty theft, a DUI to a sex offense or murder – doesn’t mean that they are animals. It doesn’t mean that they don’t deserve the same protection under the law that the rest of us would expect.”

A senior in the Salmon P. Chase College of Law at Northern Kentucky University, Renzenbrink was a member of the Constitutional Law Clinic with the Ohio Justice and Policy Center (www.ojpc.org) when he argued Hamilton’s case in front of the Sixth Circuit Court. He has also served as co-counsel with the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office in Kenton County and assisted with two felony convictions.

“When it comes to the criminal justice system ... it shouldn’t be treated as though it’s a high-school rivalry,” Renzenbrink says. “The only way to have any sort of progress in these systems – and this is the way it was originally designed – is a sense of compromise, both ideally and practically.”

Denied a review of the ruling by the entire Sixth Circuit Court, the Ohio Attorney General’s office is now in the midst of negotiating a settlement with Hamilton. Renzenbrink says Hamilton is



Brett Renzenbrink. Photo by Aimie Willhoite.

confined to his home as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder – he can’t be in a public place “without thinking someone is going to attack him” – and some form of restitution will serve as a recognition that that prison system messed up.

“I don’t think for a minute that giving him money is going to change what he has become,” Renzenbrink says. “He wants to make sure that, if anything happens to him, that his grandkids are taken care of.”

As for Renzenbrink, the months of preparation, arguing before the court and the outcomes will have a lasting impact on his future career.

“I do feel like it was something that’s important, and it’s something that’s going to serve as a catalyst for the rest of what I do in my career,” he says.

“I have no problem with certain prison officials/positions having discretion – that is important. At some point you have to have humans there to make a human call about these decisions, especially in the case now in the Ohio prison system, where prisons are 150 to 200 percent overcrowded. Those decisions become a lot more difficult. But when it comes to a point where you have a death threat ... I think that changes the game.”

“These people are human beings. There’s no court in the United States or Ohio that, because someone is put into prison, says we throw away the key and whatever they do to each other is fine. It doesn’t mean that they are animals. It doesn’t mean that they don’t deserve the same protection under the law that the rest of us would expect.”
- Brett Renzenbrink

In addition to helping prisoners defend their rights, Ohio Justice and Policy Center offers the Second Chance Clinic, helping hundreds of first-time, non-violent offenders expunge old criminal records so they can move on with their lives. A weekly clinic meets in Over-the-Rhine, three monthly clinics are in other neighborhoods and clinics also meet at colleges, businesses, churches and community events. If you or someone you know needs help with a legal matter, contact the Ohio Justice and Policy Center at 513-421-1108.

Prickly Issue: Needle Exchange

Health agency tries to gauge possible benefits

By JEREMY FLANNERY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Stop AIDS of Cincinnati is seeking information about whether the community would benefit from a syringe-exchange program to prevent the spread of AIDS and hepatitis C.

Contaminated syringes account for about 36 percent of new human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections in the United States, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Stop AIDS says about 70 to 90 percent of injection-drug users are infected with hepatitis C.

Formerly known as AIDS Volunteers of Cincinnati, Stop AIDS is working to prevent the spread of these diseases while offering medical services to people already infected. Amy McMahon, the agency's CEO, says Stop AIDS provides free testing for HIV and hepatitis C. Clients have the option of anonymous or confidential testing. For people who test positive, case managers coordinate education, counseling and medical services. Housing assistance is also provided to eligible clients. Stop AIDS currently assists about 1,000 clients with case management, McMahon says. All of their services are provided free of charge.

From 2006 to 2008, about 29 percent of people tested by Stop AIDS were infected with the hepatitis C virus, according to Adam Reilly, a Stop AIDS educator. An estimated 200,000 Ohioans statewide are infected.

Would a needle-exchange program stop the spread of the disease?

"We're just trying to get a handle on the local situation to see how effective it would be," McMahon says. "It's a politically charged issue because people will argue you're enabling drug use. I understand this argument, but I don't agree with it. It's not a drug issue as much as a public-safety issue. You don't want kids finding these syringes or people in public picking them up and using them."

Current and former injection-drug users are completing surveys for Stop AIDS to offer information about how they obtain, clean and discard their syringes, Reilly says. Sixty surveys have been completed, and the agency hopes to get 20 to 30 more, he says.

Health professionals, police officers and injection drug users are participating in focus groups hosted by Stop AIDS to provide information and discussion about the issue, McMahon says. Thirty focus groups have met, and Stop AIDS aims to conduct 20 more. Reilly estimates it will take two more months to obtain the rest of the surveys and host the other focus groups.

"When you get regular participation from police officers and medical professionals – and these are beat cops who have a great idea of what's going on in the area – then we really get an idea of the local situation and a better collaboration and coordination of services," McMahon says.

The organization will make the data available to the public once the collection and analysis is completed, Reilly says.

"Instead of just showing up and talking, most of them have been eager to look up drug courts' and probation courts' records to provide statistics with their own encounters," Reilly says.

The majority of injection-drug users who participated in the focus groups said they found syringes in public places, according to Reilly. Users often clean the syringes with water or household chemicals



A needle exchange program might improve public health, according to Adam Reilly and Amy McMahon of Stop AIDS. *Photos by Aimie Willhoite.*

such as disinfectant sprays, he says. Reilly wants to educate users that bleach is the effective way to clean syringes before use and that a sharps container is the safest way to dispose of used syringes. But many participants within the focus groups laughed at the suggestion of using sharps containers, he says.

"They recognize that that's the best way to go with it, but they just don't see that option available in the public area," Reilly says.

Stop AIDS employs 26 full-time and one part-time staff and has about 400 volunteers, McMahon says. The total hours donated by over 200 active volunteers was equivalent to 13 full-time staff positions last year, she says.

Congress passed an appropriations bill in December that includes a provision ending the ban against federal funds being used for needle-exchange programs. The provision allows state and local governments to decide if federal funds can be used for such programs.

In Ohio, State Rep. Tyrone Yates (D-Cincinnati) last year introduced House Bill 274. If the bill becomes law, it will "provide an affirmative defense to certain offenses involving a hypodermic or syringe that the person is 18 years of age or older and possesses or otherwise obtains the hypodermic or syringe for the purpose of having a clean needle to avoid HIV exposure and to permit an authorized person to sell or furnish a hypodermic without a prescription to a person who is 18 years of age or older who wishes to obtain it for that purpose."

The Free Medical Clinic of Greater Cleveland currently is the only clinic in Ohio that provides a syringe-exchange program.

For more information about Stop AIDS' services or volunteer options, call 513-421-2437 or visit www.stopaidscincinnati.org.



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May They Finally Rest in Peace

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Friends and family gather around a barrel in Washington Park to remember homeless and formerly homeless individuals who passed away in 2009. A candle for each person was lit in their honor and memory.
Photo by Aimie Willhoite.

was on a liquid diet before she pasted away. She tried to sneak a solid meal; and when she was caught, she cussed out the nurses. She died later that day.”

Derek Gibson, who was in his 50s, died of congestive heart failure.

“He was getting back on his feet,” Silver says. “He helped his sister out at her hair salon. He was really close with his family. He was housed with us before he passed away. We were happy about that. He didn’t die homeless.”

Frank Roper was taken off life support by his family after suffering a major heart attack. He was in his 50s.

“Frank was a good guy,” says Valerie Dowell, an advocate with the Health Care for the Homeless program. “He was a real mild-mannered person. I saw him maybe a week before he died. I had known him in the past. He went to the Drop Inn Center drug and alcohol program. He just couldn’t get it together. About a week before he passed, I saw him sitting outside. I talked to him and let him know he didn’t have to do this. I told him if he ever needed any help, he could call me.”

Rodney Sosby, who was in his 40s, died from an over-

dose of pain medication while staying at the Drop Inn Center. Dowell says he spoke often about his family and how he wanted to get himself together.

“He complained about his knees and his legs hurting a lot,” Dowell says. “The day before he took the pills, I was talking to him about trying to get housing. It kind of shook me when I heard he died, because we had just been talking the day before.”

Eric Smothers, who was in his 30s, died when medication prescribed for an infection sent him into cardiac arrest. He was a longtime resident of the Drop Inn Center.

“He had a beautiful spirit,” Dowell says. “His death took me for a loop also. It was really hard to get him into housing. When he got into housing, he showed me his keys.”

Eugene Burgess, who was in his 50s, was a longtime resident of Over-the-Rhine who had a long criminal history with drugs and alcohol. He suffered from leg ulcers; and because of his drug use, he didn’t take care of himself. He had stayed at the Drop Inn Center and Respite Care Center until Dowell helped him find permanent housing.

“He had been in housing

for six months,” she says. “I gave him a referral for a guy who rents rooms, and that’s where he was living.”

Anthony Wright, a longtime resident of Over-the-Rhine, died from a heart attack while incarcerated for drug charges. He had high blood pressure and a long history of drug abuse.

“He went to the penitentiary, and two days before he was supposed to be released, he had a heart attack and passed away,” Dowell says.

Joseph Wright, who was in his late 50s, died after a long bout with cancer. A Navy veteran, he worked to become sober at Joseph House, which serves homeless veterans, according to Calvin Wooten, associate director and treatment coordinator for the agency.

Ken Tucker was also a victim of cancer. An Air Force veteran, he worked with Joseph House to overcome his addictions before his death.

Others who passed away in 2009 include James Arnold, David “Peaches” Bryant, Bob Carle, Dorris Dawson, Jessie Frank, John Graham, Matthew Harmeyer, Albert Ollie, Eddie Seamon and Scott Wheeler.

Metropole Tenants Gain Support

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

housing discrimination by 3CDC. A statement by the religious group says the forced displacement of the residents is immoral: “It is morally wrong to forcibly move a people from their homes for capital gain.”

Support for the HUD complaint also comes from Affordable Housing Advocates. Elizabeth Brown, president of the organization, wrote HUD, saying 3CDC’s plan will adversely affect racial integration in Cincinnati.

“Removal of these residents from the neighborhood clearly does not ‘affirmatively further fair housing,’ ” Brown wrote. “Rather, it furthers the destruction of an integrated community and creation of another racially segregated neighborhood in the Cincinnati area, the eighth most segregated urban area in the United States.”

Progressives who back the tenants were, however, surprised by a Dec. 9 report on the issue in a once reliably progressive newspaper, *CityBeat*. The article’s language casts the controversy in terms that are sometimes deceptive and that at other times seem calculated to make the case for 3CDC.

The subhead for the article, for example, says, “Metropole’s conversion sparks tenant relocation,” as if the tenants have a choice in the matter. A more accurate, if unintended, description comes from the article’s quotation of 3CDC President Stephen Leeper: “We literally drive people to other buildings,” he told *CityBeat*.

Perhaps most disappointing was the uncritical way that the article repeats 3CDC’s characterization of the role played by the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, which publishes *Streetvibes*.

“The corporation believes the relocation actually will leave tenants with better homes and that the Homeless Coalition is intentionally stoking fear among tenants in an effort to generate controversy,” *CityBeat* reported.

Lay aside, if you will, the paper’s failure to question the premise that opposing the loss of low-income housing is motivated by a desire to “generate controversy.”

The article’s major failing is in *CityBeat*’s own institutional memory. Reporting 3CDC’s claim that eviction will leave Metropole tenants “with better homes,” the paper seems ignorant of its own reporting on previous 3CDC promises.

In 2006 *CityBeat* recounted the corporation’s takeover of a low-income boarding house on Race Street in Over-the-Rhine, quoting a 3CDC official saying, “We worked with the landlord to find alternative housing for residents.” That assertion evoked a quick rejoinder from a pastor who said 3CDC’s assistance wasn’t worth much and led, as *CityBeat* reported, to at least one resident having to take shelter at the Drop Inn Center.

Back issues of *CityBeat* aren’t the only documents worthy of reference as Metropole tenants fight to save their homes. Rob Goeller, civil-rights outreach coordinator for the Homeless Coalition, points to 3CDC’s own articles of organization as a non-profit corporation.

The documents say 3CDC is committed “to combat community deterioration, provide relief to the poor and distressed (and) eliminate discrimination and prejudice.”

Whether the corporation’s takeover of the Metropole qualifies as providing “relief to the poor” is now a matter that HUD will have to adjudicate.

Meanwhile filmmaker Barbara Wolf has given tenants the opportunity to have their own say in *The Metropole is Our Home*. The film can be viewed at <http://www.vimeo.com/8127941>.



The Metropole Apartments are located on Walnut Street.
Photo by Clarissa Peppers.

New Voices of the Voiceless

Underground rappers restore empathy and originality in Hip Hop

By ARIANA SHAHANDEH
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Fifteen years ago a man wrote a song using a woman he loved as a metaphor for something else that broke his heart.

The woman was soulful and independent. Her creativity was penetrating. The man wrote that he met her when he was 10 years old and he anticipated her always being there for him in the future. They grew up together on the East Coast. He shared his lyrics with her and they connected over a mutual appreciation for authenticity and music.

"If you keep feeding people the same meal over and over again, eventually they're gonna want something else. And I think we're at the point in Hip Hop where people want something else."

- Jasiri X

Then she moved to Los Angeles. She got into show business. She changed her clothes, her friends, her purity. Drugs and sadness consumed her. The songwriter was rapper Common. And at the end of the song, he exposes who she really is: "Who I'm talking 'bout y'all is Hip Hop."

Common's song, "I Used to Love H.E.R (Hip hop in its Essence is Real)," was about his experience with disillusionment. He watched something he loved and respected become something ugly. But he stayed in the game as a Hip Hop artist, similar to how someone might stay in an unhealthy relationship, hoping for change. He used a woman as a metaphor for the industry to illustrate the pain of watching love change. He loved Hip Hop. It was hijacked by influences outside himself, and the original character was lost. It has become a timeless parallel.

'It's just shocking'

Today the metaphor is remixed by an emerging Hip Hop artist from Brooklyn NY, Radiant Amar, with a short lyrical video series he collectively titles, "I Still Love H.E.R." It's Amar's way of re-inspiring hope in the music we once called the voice of the voiceless.

"I still love Hip Hop in its original form," he says. "I'm just trying to revolutionize it and take it to a different place."

In his full song, "Piece of the Pie," Amar writes, "I could write a verse about the cars and clothes, the bank rolls and hoes/How every night the weed smoke's flowing out of my nose/Platinum plaques coming out of these flows." In an industry where these topics rule the airwaves, Amar follows with a more authentic admission: "When in reality I hardly get shows/I'm not hard to provoke/'Cause where I'm from you might get scarred or get choked/Or both, by street entrepreneurs that's out for C-notes.../Hope that you're a friend and not a foe when I'm hungry/But it's funny 'cause even friends are foes when it comes down to money."

While Amar addresses the ugliness surrounding money in his environment, most mainstream material paints a different picture.

"Ninety percent of what's on the radio is indifference," says underground rapper Jasiri X. "Think about all the songs that are still being played (about) how much jewelry and how much ice and how much money is being thrown in the air – and we're in one of the worst economic recessions."

Jasiri X further comments on the disconnect between mainstream artists and their audiences in his song, "Silent Night," in which he draws attention to the lack of social commentary on many mainstream rap albums: "I ain't talkin TI's wife or Keisha Cole's Mama/I'm talkin none of us voting one year after Obama/I ain't talkin bout Chris Brown and how he put his fist down/I'm talkin bout tea parties that lie about big crowds/All these media distractions have a crushing effect/A burning house always takes out the ones who slept."

When asked if he thought such commentary was an obligation, Jasiri said, "At a time when there is so much upheaval in the world politically – the economy, so many people are suffering – it's just shocking that you can come out with an album and not (comment)."

Getting H.E.R. back

Jay Z, a popular mainstream rap/hip hop artist, has been most criticized for the lack of social commentary on his latest album, Blueprint 3. Now that he is among the most successful musical entertainers in the world, what will he write about that people can relate to? Jay Z dug a creative hole for himself by limiting his material to one source: his experiences.

When he was first rising from a life of drug dealing, his music was rel-

"A friend of mine sister's boyfriend shot his mother over some kind of dispute. And if there weren't guns all throughout the street, that wouldn't have happened."

- Radiant Amar

evant to many people because it defined moments and attitudes of struggle, discontent and hope for something better. But what was thought to be empathy was actually just sincerity. He was rapping about his own experiences; they just happen to be familiar with many others'. Now that his experiences have narrowed, so has his pool of inspiration. What started out as a strength for Jay Z is now his greatest lacking.

An artist attempting to give voice to those who can't speak for themselves must be able to form a connection to them. Coming from a background of violence and struggle, Radiant Amar attempts to reach out and affect his audience's experiences, playing for charity fundraisers and organizing community programs.

In collaboration with his brother and mainstream rapper TI's KINGS organization, Amar designed a "Turn in Your Gun Day" at Texas Southern University. Anyone could come and turn in any guns, registered

or unregistered, without legal repercussions.

"A friend of mine sister's boyfriend shot his mother over some kind of dispute," Amar says. "And if there weren't guns all throughout the street, that wouldn't have happened. So we decided something had to be done."

With an upcoming campaign to get their music played on local stations across the country, and consistently positive support on Youtube, Amar's and Jasiri's success, despite not having support of a major label, demonstrates the level of support in Hip Hop audiences for a more complete genre.

"If you keep feeding people the same meal over and over again, eventually they're gonna want something else," Jasiri says. "And I think we're at the point in Hip Hop where people want something else. That's why you see artists like Lil Wayne coming out with rock, and Kid Cudi making some fusion (music). They're just trying to be different than the same old "Shake ya booty, we're going to drink a whole bunch of champagne."

Radiant Amar and Jasiri X both rap about their experiences, but that is not where their expression stops. In Jay Z's 15-track album, Blueprint 3, the words "I" (including contractions) and "me" appear approximately 450 times. Another mainstream rapper, Drake, used those words nearly 375 times on his seven-track mix tape, *So Far Gone*. Artists like Amar and Jasiri have written complete songs using those words only a handful of times, if at all.

Beyond sincerity, a Hip Hop artist needs to be above self-centeredness. Empathy is a resource artists can utilize forever. There will always be material if you are capable of being inspired by others' experiences – if you are capable of feeling their pain, hoping with them, loving with them, crying with them, being too prideful for their own good with them, being insecure with them, omitting the truth with them, finding God with them, losing God with them. When Hip Hop becomes less of an "I and Me" – and more of an us, we and you – genre, we may have H.E.R back.



Jasiri X (right) gives an interview about homelessness in Pittsburgh.

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Obama Wrong about Non-violence

His thesis is dangerous
and misinformed

By STEVE SUNDERLAND
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As a peace educator, I look at the president's recent speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize with sadness.

I had wanted the president to add his "teachings" to history's heroes of peace – Gandhi, Mandela and King – and celebrate their deep wisdom about promoting peace precisely at a time when violence and terrorism were gaining favor. I had wanted to read and hear the president acknowledge that the fable of violence has to be understood and rejected.

The fable goes something like this: Violence is the reality of the world and must be met with violence or otherwise the evil forces of the world will see weakness and make more violence. The logic of the fable is that strategic violence can prevent both limited and broad-scale violence by showing the makers of violence that their actions will never be tolerated.

I wanted President Obama to reject this fable as having little sway as his guiding principles, just as it had no philosophical or political weight for Gandhi, Mandela and King. The violence of the soldier, being a killer and being killed, as acts of service were no long tolerable as the central way of governing, I had longed to hear him say. I wanted the president to turn the rationale for violence on its head and instead make clear that a new day in diplomacy will be tried, that a hierarchy of peaceful efforts will be made, and that violence and lethal sacrifice would be used only as a last straw, only in defense and only with great caution.

The 21st century, I hoped he would say, cannot go any further along the path of filling cemeteries with "enemies" and "heroes" and expect that these results will stop violence.

I listened for him to say this is a new day of hope and tragedy. Hope because nations, communities and individuals believe that we can resolve conflicts with compassion, discussion, compromise, innovation and reconciliation; and the United States will be going down this path, opening discussions, crossing borders with respect, discussing taboo areas of history and meaning and working even harder for justice through non-violence. As a leader of a major nation, he has learned from

The president must know that every tyrant has used the language of justice to justify acts of brutality,

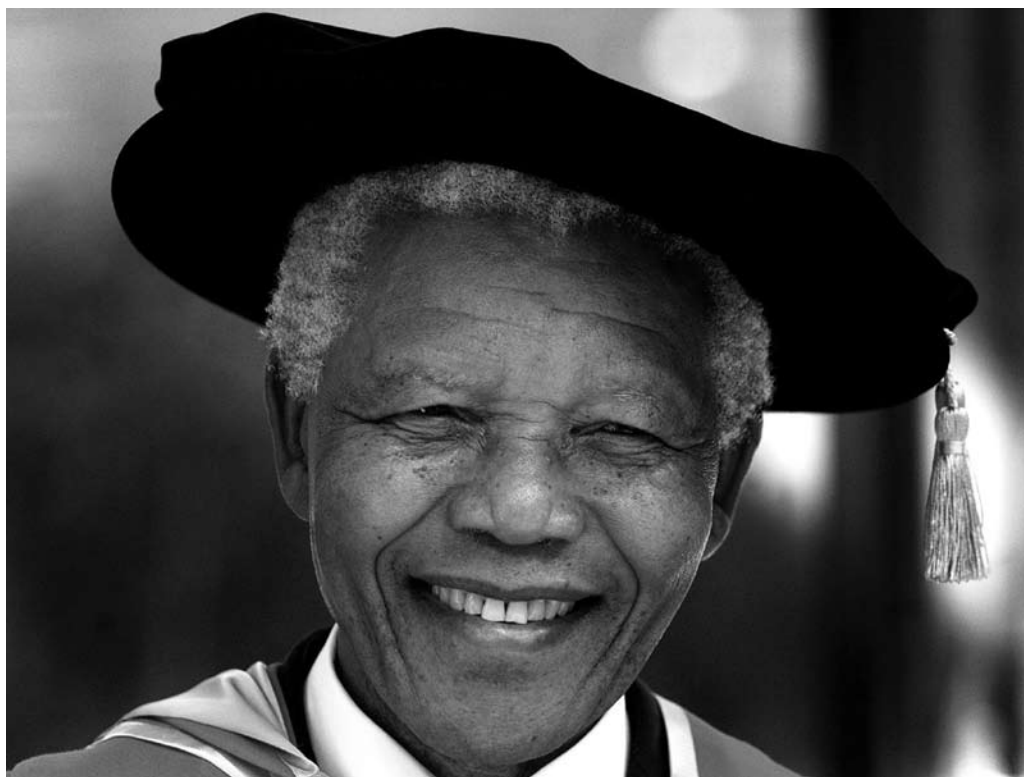
Gandhi and Mandela that non-violence can be achieved as a part of governance, and he has learned from King that non-violence is a productive seed for the future.

Tragedy, because so many people have bought into the fable of violence as the answer and justify the destruction of people by many violent means. The United States is fighting two wars within the confines of the fable. It is tragic that "reality" is only represented as empowering the violent tendencies in individuals and countries.

Obama's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, instead of being a brief for peace, is an eloquent defense of violence.

It is wrong. Violence, dressed up as "just war," is a way of justifying actions that cannot be acceptable to those of us who are committed to peace. I say, "dressed up," because constructive peace, peace with justice and dignity, cannot rest on violence, either threatened or actual.

Sadly, Obama has mistakenly chosen to use the heroes of peace – Gandhi, King and Mandela – as people different from him, people who were not heads of governments that had obligations to protect their lands. Even more tragically, Obama has used the examples of Hitler and Al Qaeda as case studies in the inability of non-violence to stop state violence and local terrorism.



Former South African President Nelson Mandela. *REUTERS/David Gray.*

What is so wrong about these examples is that people might use Obama's statements to skip over the complicated history of the role of resistance and non-violence in fighting Hitler and Al Qaeda. Moreover, it ignores the history of successful civil rights movement against terrorism in America and Mandela's repudiation of violence in successfully changing the brutal South African government. Non-violent methods, while usually not as dramatic as bombs and gunfire, have had and are having a steady positive effect on all forms of coercion.

To speak at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony of the limited effectiveness of non-violence in recent history continues a mind-set of excluding non-violent approaches as a basis for real politics or an effective response to conflict and turns advocates of non-violence into naive and romantic people. The belief that "real" governments and leaders cannot dare use

non-violence if their attempts at policy and personal conflict reduction are to be taken seriously is a dangerous rewriting of history.

The president must know that every tyrant has used the language of justice to justify acts of brutality, whether the "justice" arises from a phony reading of a law or the "justice" springs from a manipulated religious principle or the promotion of a bogus sense of national character.

The reality is that non-violence is both a tough-minded concept and a tough behavior to live in policy and personal life. Choosing to have checks and balances, or deciding to allow all voices in major decisions, including dissenting ones, or resisting arbitrary uses of religious and secular laws, or encouraging participation by previously held-back groups, or making room for different standards and people in places and experiences, or seeking counseling for temptations to violence, or allowing alternative ways of solving conflict to flourish, are all actions that require a muscular approach to human relations.

Resisting violence in word and deed forces the compassionate person to look deeply into how shallow or profound are his own concepts. The greatness of Gandhi, King and Mandela was in their capacity to look at violence and reject it in any form even if it meant jail, brutality and torture. Their reality was, unlike President Obama, created in a lifetime of struggling with acts of personal and political violence. The threats of brutality were realized as oppressive governments and individuals seized on their tenacious hold on non-violence. This history of courage, wisdom and love has yet to be fully shared with our culture in ways that change the weight of compassion to the greater strength.



The grave of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. *REUTERS/Tami Chappell.*

Veggie Philly Steak

“Feed Me, Seymour, Feed Me All Night Long”



Photo by Jeni Jenkins.

By JENI JENKINS
STAFF WRITER

This quotation is from the 1986 film, *Little Shop of Horrors*, in which a plant-keeper must meet the demands of a ravenous plant that feeds on humans. Instead of plants that feed on people, this column is for people who feed on plants!

I love food. I especially enjoy sampling and preparing

new and exotic veggie cuisine from all over the world. Since converting to vegetarianism three years ago I've struggled preparing certain recipes from my own meat-and-potatoes background, so I have taken up re-creating traditional dishes that call for meat and re-inventing them with a vegetarian twist. I hope you enjoy them as much as I.

Before I became a vegetarian I used to love to go to one

particular street vendor who served up one of the best tasting Philly cheese-steak sandwiches on the curb in my hometown. Here is my veggie twist on this tantalizing fave.

Serving size: Completely dependent on the number of bellies or the size of the bellies, but I would say 3-4 fairly hungry bellies.

(Created with the help of my good friend, Brian Forsythe).

Chipotle Veggie Philly

- Brian's Specialty Chipotle Mayo*
- 1 up mayo (or vegenaïse)
 - 3 chipotle chilies in adobo sauce (available in ethnic-food section of grocery store)
 - In a food processor, combine mayo and chilies, and blend until smooth. It's OK to have a few chunks of chilies.
 - Cover and refrigerate.

- Sandwich*
- 1.5 tablespoons olive oil
 - 1 large white onion, sliced into rings
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1-2 Anaheim chilies, cut into ¼-inch strips
 - 1-2 red sweet peppers, cut into ¼-inch strips
 - (Mix and match different kinds of peppers of your choosing)
 - 1 package baby bella mushrooms, sliced, with stems removed
 - 3-4 whole wheat hoagie rolls (or your preferred vegan bread)
 - 8 oz. Provolone cheese (or no cheese for vegans)
 - Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
Heat 1 tablespoon oil in skillet or wok over medium low heat.
Sauté veggies, adding them to the pan in this order:
1. Onions and garlic, 3-4 minutes until the onions turn translucent
2. Add peppers, cook approximately 1 min 30 seconds
3. Turn the heat up slightly to medium-high, add the mushrooms and sauté until golden brown. Remove from heat.
Lightly coat the back of each hoagie with the left-over olive oil, using a basting brush
Bake the hoagies on a baking pan, oil side up, at 350 for 3-5 minutes.
Remove from oven, flip and place face-up on baking pan. Divide the sautéed veggie mixture onto the hoagies. Top with cheese.
Heat sandwiches until cheese is melted or slightly browned.
Remove from oven and spread each roll with chipotle mayo.
Feed!

Alone

By DAVID GRAHAM

I am a broken bridge between generations past,
and those yet unsung.
I am a mountain of old ideals, standing above a
valley of budding dreams.
I am a blind bird in flight, seeking familiar voices
to guide me home.
I am alone.
I am a visionary within vision, shaking my fist
at an unshakeable God.
I am a boy at heart, trying to make sense
of a crumbling world.
I am society's hope, of living carefree in a
wilderness of peace.
I am alone.
I am yesterday and today, the future,
an untraveled path.
I am a faulty compass, mapping out
uncharted desire.
I am old and young, newly born, and dying of a broken heart.
I am alone.

Artwork by Anthony Williams



Say What?!

“One’s struggle against oppression is meaningless ...
unless it is connected to the oppression of others.”
-- Alice Walker, *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart: A Novel*

Not a ‘Precious’ Happy Ending

“Sometimes I wish I was not alive. But I don’t know how to die. Ain’ no plug to pull out. ‘N no matter how bad I feel my heart don’t stop beating and my eyes open in the morning.”
~ *Precious in Push by Sapphire.*

By **LYNNE AUSMAN**
STAFF WRITER

Precious is based on Sapphire’s book *Push*. At 16, Claireece Precious Jones (played by Gabby Sidibe) has survived hardships most of us luckily will never have to experience.

Precious is physically abused by her mother, raped by her father and tormented at school. She is illiterate, poor and without support. It seems that the odds are stacked against her – and they are, but Precious still carries on. Set in 1987 Harlem, Precious is surrounded by poverty, drug dealers, addicts and hopelessness.

Mo’Nique breaks from her usual comedic roles and gives an astounding performance as Mary, the abusive and demanding mother with the right amount love masked by jealously and anger.

Precious has one child and is pregnant with a second by her own father. Mary knows but does not stop the abuse. In one clip, we see her father descending on Precious as her mother peeks in the room while walking down the hall.

Precious, 16, is in junior high school. Because of this and her size, the other students torment her. When Precious is called to the counselor’s office, she is asked to talk about her home life and pregnancy. When she refuses to talk, she is discharged from the school. Regardless of Precious’s dislike of the school counselor, the counselor proves to be the first of several advocates on her side. She tells Precious about an alternative school, Each One Teach One, which can help Precious prepare for and earn a GED.

Throughout the movie, Precious is asked to speak about the incest she endures, her home life and her mother’s abuse of the social-welfare system. Each time Precious flashes into an alternate reality, where she is an entertainment star with a seemingly perfect life. She has an attractive “light-skinned” boyfriend, fashionable clothes and is the center of attention for a mass of adoring fans and photographers.

At Each One Teach One, Precious finds friendship, support, compassion and Ms. Rain (played by Paula Patton). Although the role is somewhat preachy and melodramatic, Ms. Rain becomes more than Precious’s teacher. She encourages Precious to write in a journal daily and responds with advice and guidance. The journal serves as Precious’s sounding board but also allows her to develop her reading and writing skills.

Soon after starting at Each One Teach One, Precious goes into labor and has a healthy baby boy. She stays in the hospital for a few days and then returns to her mother’s home. Upon her arrival, Mary beats Precious so severely that she flees and becomes homeless. Ms. Rain spends the entire next day on the phone looking for a place for Precious. She finds a bed at a halfway house, where Pre-

cious has the opportunity to continue attending school to earn her GED, care for her child and build her own life. She begins to heal and move on with her life through the support of her new friends and counselors.

Just when things seem to be improving for Precious, Mary visits to tell her that her father has died. Precious takes the news with the same blank stare that has been her hallmark throughout the movie. It wasn’t until her mother gave her the news that her father had AIDS that Precious reacts with some emotion. She is in obvious disbelief yet still stoic and tells her mother to get tested. She

speaks nothing of her own status, but her knowledge of her future clearly shows on her face. She is terrified, angry, shocked. But she maintains her stoicism until her mother leaves and she is back in Ms. Rain’s classroom.

Precious stares at “Why me?” written on the top of her page. In a spontaneous confession, she reveals that she is HIV-positive. After watching Precious endure and move past the physical and sexual abuse that has identified her, if the viewer has any amount of hope left, it is all dashed away in this moment. I struggled to fight off the tears. Not tears of pity or sympathy, but tears of hopelessness, despair, defeat.

I had read *Push* several weeks prior to seeing *Precious*. I was aware what was about to

happen, aware that the audience was still to hear Mary’s horrifying confession and attempt at justifying the abuse. Confession that Precious’s father began abusing her when she was just 3 years old. Confession that she was jealous of and angry with Precious because he seemed to desire Precious more than Mary. That Mary blamed Precious for her terrible life.

In an amazing display of strength and perseverance, Precious silently stands up and leaves the room, leaves her mother with a counselor who says nothing and just stares in disbelief. Mary continues to try to explain, justify, babble but it all falls on deaf ears. Precious is long gone, moving on.

We all know that the trials of Precious’s life are far from over. At the end, she is still in pre-GED prep classes at Each One Teach One, still living in the halfway house, still a 17-year-old mother of two, still HIV-positive. The message of *Precious* is not overcoming the past; it is building the future despite the past.

In an odd way, it’s refreshing to see a movie in which the main character doesn’t achieve some loosely plausible success. We all know that people can overcome insurmountable hurdles and find housing, success, new lives. But the reality is that it doesn’t happen very often. Not every person on the street is a Chris Gardener (*In Pursuit of Happyness*) or a Liz Murray (*Homeless to Harvard*). It’s the seemingly small successes that we must celebrate – that someone enrolled in a GED program, that someone developed the strength to leave a bad situation, that someone has entered transitional housing.



Homeless Coalition Marks 25 Years

Annual dinner
looks back,
then forward

By GREGORY FLANNERY
EDITOR

Liz Carter used to think she knew why some people in Cincinnati are homeless or hungry. As the keynote speaker at the annual dinner of the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, held Dec. 17 at the Cintas Center at Xavier University, she explained what she thought she knew.

"I'll give you a confession," Carter said. "Ten years ago I was one of those people who thought that, in Cincinnati, if you're not making it, it's probably because you're not trying hard enough."

Then she went on a visit with a social worker from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the agency she now serves as executive director.

Carter and the social worker waited as their beneficiary, an elderly woman, traipsed

down three flights of stairs, then led them up to her two-room apartment. One room contained only a mattress, Carter said. In the other room were a couch, a coffee table, a sink and a cabinet – but no refrigerator.

The woman needed help to pay for her utilities. Asked if she also needed food, the woman said no, and showed them her stock of supplies: three cans of applesauce.

"I came away a different person," Carter said. "My heart was touched, and my life was changed by her. And I didn't ever again think that, if a person is struggling, it's their fault."

The theme of the Homeless Coalition's annual dinner was "25 Years: Fighting for Today, Building Our Tomorrow." The theme captured the sense of celebration and consternation that marks the coalition's continued existence, according to Josh Spring, its executive director.

"Our founders, some of whom are in this room, did not expect we would need to be a homeless coalition 25

years later," he said. "They thought the establishment of such a coalition would actually ensure the end of homelessness and that therefore we would be temporary. ... We are still fighting the same battles we have been fighting for 25 years. We just keep struggling."

Spring enumerated the struggles off 2009:

- Resisting city council's effort to use zoning regulations to restrict human-services agencies in Over-the-Rhine, the subject of a lawsuit in federal court by the Homeless Coalition against the city of Cincinnati;
- Successfully lobbying city council to keep funding for human services in the city's budget, though still below the 1.5 percent that had for many years been the city's minimum standard;
- Convincing council not to eliminate homelessness as a priority in human-services funding;
- Beating back a city councilman's proposal to tax the proceeds of panhandling;
- Keeping the city's cold shel-

ter open after the city considered closing it.

"We knew, if that happened, people will die," Spring said. "We're frankly not OK with people freezing to death."

The coalition also worked in 2009 to change attitudes in the future, Spring said. Its speakers bureau made presentations at 119 events, reaching 4,452 people, he said. *Streetvibes*, published by the Homeless Coalition, sold more than 58,000 copies.

"We are for sure sparking dinner conversations and inspiring future revolutionaries," Spring said. "You and I are part of a grand movement, absolutely founded to absolutely end homelessness. We are strong, and we are relentless."

The coalition honored some of its most relentless allies.

Terry Ranson received the Jimmy Heath *Streetvibes* Vendor of the Year Award.

The Jerry Render Award went to Theresa Portis, Clark Roper, Darrel Portis and Darious Portis, a once homeless family who now volunteers to

help other homeless families. Their determination, mutual support in the face of adversity and commitment to help others embody "the very best of family. Leading by example, the family continues to inspire all of us at the Interfaith Hospitality Network," said Georgine Getty, the agency's executive director.

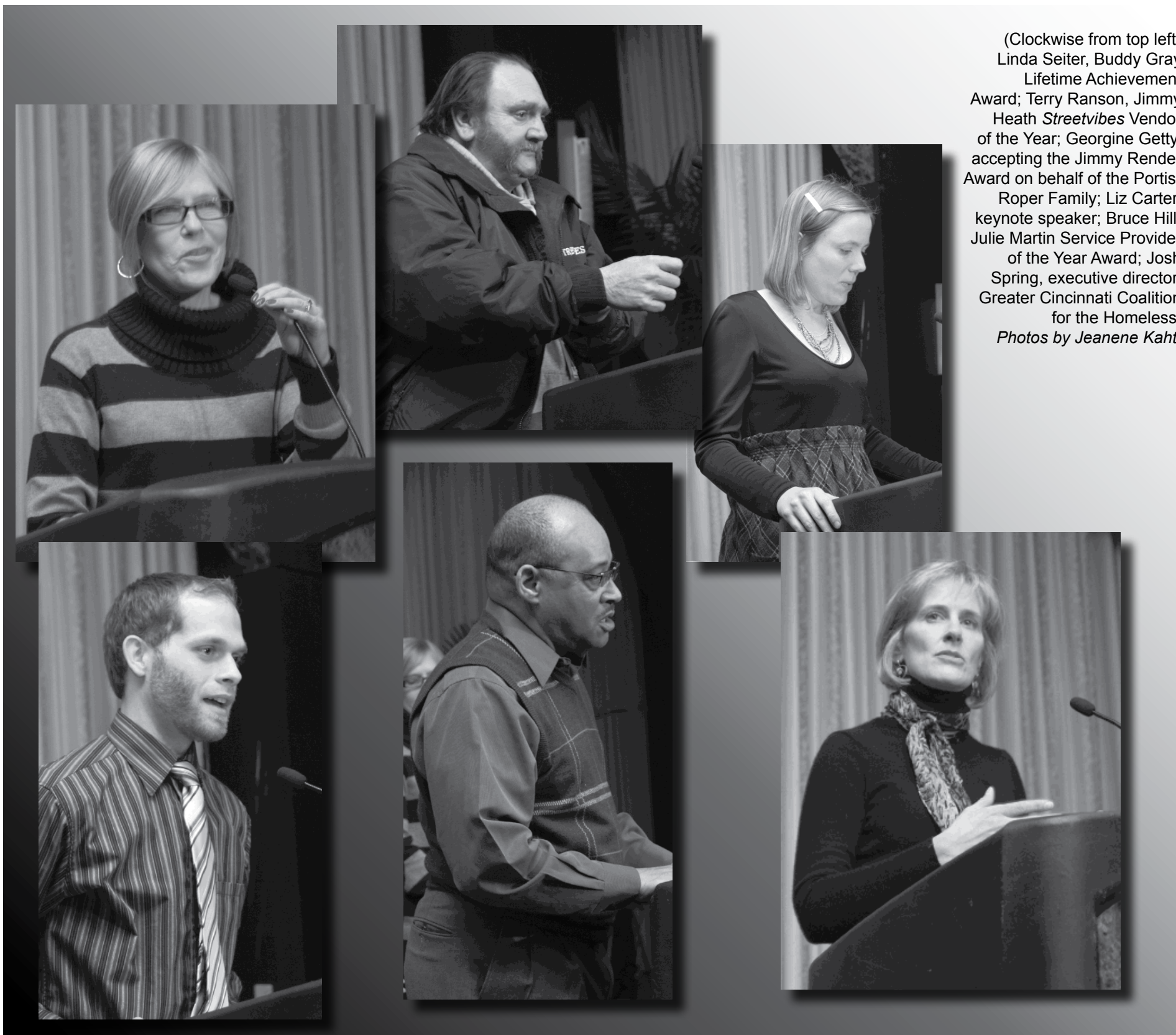
Bruce Hill of the Cincinnati Health Network received the Julie Martin Provider of the Year Award for his work helping homeless people who are HIV-positive or have AIDS.

Linda Seiter, executive director of Caracole, which provides housing and support services to people living with HIV/AIDS, received the Buddy Gray Lifetime Achievement Award. It was Seiter who best summed up the spirit of the annual dinner.

"There is nothing in this world," she said, "that I would rather be doing with my life than what I'm doing right now."

Fighting for today, building our tomorrow.

(Clockwise from top left) Linda Seiter, Buddy Gray Lifetime Achievement Award; Terry Ranson, Jimmy Heath *Streetvibes* Vendor of the Year; Georgine Getty, accepting the Jimmy Render Award on behalf of the Portis-Roper Family; Liz Carter, keynote speaker; Bruce Hill, Julie Martin Service Provider of the Year Award; Josh Spring, executive director, Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless. Photos by Jeanene Kaht.



Helping Hamid and Understanding

Fundraiser for injured taxi driver unites community

By STEVEN PAUL LANSKY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Many people open their hearts, wallets, pocketbooks, purses and minds at Sitwell's Coffeehouse in Clifton on a cold Thursday night in December.

Hamid Kerdougheli, (who bears a striking resemblance to the famous photographer, Man Ray) is a Ron's Taxi driver who was shot in the neck in the late afternoon of Nov. 28. Kerdougheli, an Algerian-American is a regular at Sitwell's. This is a place that is its own destination. Algerians, both Berbers and Arabs, visit daily for espresso demitasses, conversation, the good food, and atmosphere.

On this bitter night, over a hundred friends – young, old, men, women, all races – gather to raise money for Kerdougheli's family's living and medical expenses. Kerdougheli had surgery on his larynx and will need speech therapy once he can eat again. Cur-

rently he is in the hospital on a feeding tube.

Steph Carson, a photographer and friend of Kerdougheli, is on the microphone describing his condition. The restaurant is noisy, people ordering food and drinks, baristas running blenders and milk steamers and doing dishes. The room is warm, conversations are animated, some not in English. Many

students are preparing for exams; teachers celebrate the end of a quarter or semester. Carson is wearing a Berber dress given to her in Algeria; it is colorful with detailed embroidery. She talks about the circumstances surrounding it. She poses questions about Algeria for prizes.

Young women in sweaters and scarves lift their heads from books, shout answers after raising their hands. Then comes the raffle. Sybilka Storie, a former model, manager of Sitwell's and daughter of Lisa Storie, the shop's owner, has a brown paper bag from which she pulls a ticket.



Hamid Kerdougheli. Photo by StephCarson Photography.

Around the room red tickets are strewn across the tables. The tables at Sitwell's are mismatched, as are the chairs; there is a pleasant chaotic freedom to the place.

As the raffle happens, the servers bring steaming plates of authentic Algerian food from a special menu arranged for the event. Menad Amrouchi, a friend of Kerdougheli, and others have been cooking since Wednesday night. The raffle items were generously donated by

over 25 businesses in Clifton and Northside.

Between the raffles, Algerian music plays. The food is hot, hearty, and flavorful.

What did I learn? Algeria is the second-largest country in Africa, second to Sudan. The Sahara desert takes up much of Algeria. I already knew that Algerians are social, gener-

ous, giving, hard working and love the coffeehouse culture as much as I do. Their flag is red, green and white. Algerians love football (soccer.) They won their independence from the French in 1962. There is something very right about people coming together out of gratitude and in the spirit of giving.

To donate your support, visit sitwellscoffeehouse.com/hamid or stephcarson.com/hamid.

The Bengals' Unexpected Weapon

Cincinnati has to hope it didn't peak too soon

By B. CLIFTON BURKE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

At the top, life is good but it damn sure ain't easy.

As the Bengals trudge along toward earning a playoff spot, they continue to learn more about themselves as a team and as human beings.

After beating the Steelers for the second time of the season, the Bengals felt great – and why not? They

owned a 7-2 record, had decisively vanquished each member of the AFC North and really looked comfortable in their new skin as a running team.

Since then they have lost three out of their past five games, lost their playoff momentum and more important, lost one of their teammates with the death of Chris Henry.

At this point enough has been written about Henry's

untimely passing. We at Streetvibes are saddened by such an unfortunate event and our condolences and best wishes go out to his remaining family, but anything beyond that is an internal affair and, in turn, none of our business.

What is our business, however, are the games, and the two worlds of emotional grief and football merged during Week 15 in San Diego. The result was an inspired effort

against a Charger team who many feel are part of the NFL elite, but still came up one play short and lost by a field goal in the last few seconds. It was a sad and frustrating week for the Bengals, and each among them is likely changed in some way because of it; but the loss in San Diego, and the one before it in Minnesota, has shown the world that Cincinnati can certainly compete in the post-season, but will remain the underdog against the other divisional winners.

This time it makes sense: Earlier in the season, the Bengals were rarely favored against any decent team for flimsy analytical reasons; many refused to take Cincinnati seriously just because of their past. But after visiting two playoff-like scenarios and failing each time, it appears our boys simply don't measure up as well to the real heavy hitters. I'm nervous that they peaked too soon, that they need to repair a few things before moving forward, but there's no time for that; into the labyrinth they go.

Yet we are not without hope.

The fact of the matter is that, even in the face in of so

much emotional hardship, this team and its city has enjoyed a season of rare success. This is by no means a bad team, and anything can happen in the playoffs. After all, the Bengals did play San Diego well. Take back a 20-yard loss on a bizarre fumble (or the soft coverage along the sideline by Leon Hall), and they might have won that game.

They also demonstrated against the Chargers that they *can* pass after all: Carson Palmer threw for more than 300 yards in what seemed like forever. Laveranues Coles was demoted from the starting lineup and had his most impressive day since joining the Bengals. J.P. Foschi inexplicably became a weapon.

Crazy things happen to this team. Some of it has been lots of fun, and some of it has been incredibly sad, but almost all of it has been unexpected; and that could be the most dangerous weapon on this team: the unexpected.

First, they must officially clinch the division and earn their spot, and only then we can all allow our imaginations to go silly with thoughts of the Bengals in February. Enjoy what's coming, Cincinnati, whatever that might be.

STREETVIBES
Vendor



MARY

Only purchase
Streetvibes
from BADGED
vendors.
Vendors wear
their WHITE
badges while
they sell the
paper.

On the Streets, Not 'Up in the Air'

Too bad there's no Oscar
for best corporate crap

By DAVID HEITFIELD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I predict *Up in the Air* will win a bunch of Oscars: Best picture; best adapted screenplay; best actor for George Clooney; and best supporting actor for American Airlines.

Not because it's a good picture; it's filled with the paper prototypes that Hollywood limousine liberals love, the stuff that gives lefties a bad name – for instance, *Crash* (2006 Best Picture). Rather, *Up in the Air* is to its topic du jour, corporate downsizing and a contracting job market, as *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989 Best Picture) was to racism. It feels false and hollow, despite its attempt to be The Movie Ironically Titled Because It's Really About Those Little People Down on the Ground.

After Frank Rich wrote a column in the *New York Times* a couple weeks ago declaring this movie to be required viewing for its frank and honest portrayal of people suffering in this economy, I couldn't wait to put on one of my LexisNexis shirts (we got T-shirts instead of, say, bonuses) and head down to the multiplex. You see, before my former employer cut my job, I had the wonderful experience of laying off 30 or so of my reports during the nine years I worked there, around 25 of them coming during one special Christmas season.

The plot is simple enough: Clooney plays an asshole (which he does so well) who flies around the country firing people. His singular goal in life is to amass 10 million frequent-flier miles. He also delivers corporate motivational speeches, using a backpack as a metaphor, the message being you'll be happier and more successful in life if you don't carry around a lot of baggage. Commitments are for suckers, you see; and that's why Clooney not only enjoys his work, but he takes pride in what he does.

In one sad scene of pathos, Clooney is firing a man who pulls out pictures of his kids and says, "What am I supposed to tell them?"

Never mind the ex-employee looks like he's 65 and his kids are barely past the teething stage, Clooney asks the man why kids look up to sports figures. Because sports figures are following their

dreams, he explains. Daddy has been working a crappy job, so his kids don't look up to daddy. Now's a good time to go back to his old dream of cooking in a restaurant, because his kids will love him for following his dreams, and apparently restaurants are

lining up to hire Social Security-eligible apprentice cooks. Dad looked like a huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

The most offensive parts of the movie, though, come in the bookends, the parts Mr. Rich felt to be so genuine: successive cameos of people learning they are getting laid off – and they are hostile. They cuss a lot. They call people names. They are completely self-centered and cry and bitch and moan about how unfair life is and, in one case later in the movie, threaten to jump off a bridge. Now, many of these are supposed to be "real" people who were laid off and the lines not "scripted," which I guess means it's not supposed to look as manipulative and opportunistic as it is.

So, yes, the movie pissed me off from the opening scene. Because it's completely false.

Sure, one or two might behave that way, but overwhelmingly the way people react to such bad news as the loss of their livelihood is far more human: Their egos are crushed, their future is uncertain, the pain of rejection is almost unbearable, and yet they try, as best they can, to salvage some shred of human dignity from the situation, because that's all they've got left.

It overwhelmed me when I had to lay off half my team. We worked from a script, of course; and as Clooney says in the movie, you never, ever say you are sorry or apologize – legal won't allow it. What blew me away was how many people told *me* they were sorry for *me*. They didn't want to be a bother. If they had a question, most of them would precede it with "if I'm not asking for too much," and if no answer was immediately available, they'd apologize for asking the question in the first place.

Of course they are hurt, surprised, angry, anxious – but in that moment of truth, there is an overpowering need to seek simple human dignity, the need to preserve

something that they might not even understand. I liken it to Flannery O'Connor's understanding of a moment of grace in her short stories. No matter how bad the situation, the desire to rise above it in almost any way you can plays into her guiding concept of mystery and manners; and, for her, how that speaks to the possibility of the divine.

The first person I ever fired came back to work the next morning. He had stuff to finish up, you see. I still have fond memories of that guy.

The editor of this rag you are reading, whom I'm proud to call a friend, when told he had to lay off a staff member, instead decided to lay off himself. Dignity? Grace? I'm not one to say, but it sure was cool, and it's those kind of stories that give one hope and faith in the human condition.

This movie will have none of that dignity crap, though. The closest instance also rings false: The very young, naive and annoying corporate robot with a minor in psychology who doesn't want to "settle" in life, ignoring the obvious point that she sold her soul the minute she signed up for her gig. While her character comes off pretty well as one of those emotionally empty drones who tend to populate human-resources departments, she reacts to an extreme act of selfishness by

one of the people she fires in a most unbelievable fashion. Unbelievable because, like most people in HR departments that she represents, there's nothing in her character to indicate that she is even capable of empathy, let alone acting on it.

In the end, she did get a nice letter of recommendation from Clooney, so she could get a much better job, as she was hired on sight after the boss read the letter. Of the eight people I reported to in nine years, one quit in disgust, one was demoted, and

the other six were laid off. Maybe I should've asked Clooney for a letter, too. And not that any one even reads those things any more, let alone hires someone based on one letter. Really, this downsizing climate runs deep. Someone should make a movie about it.

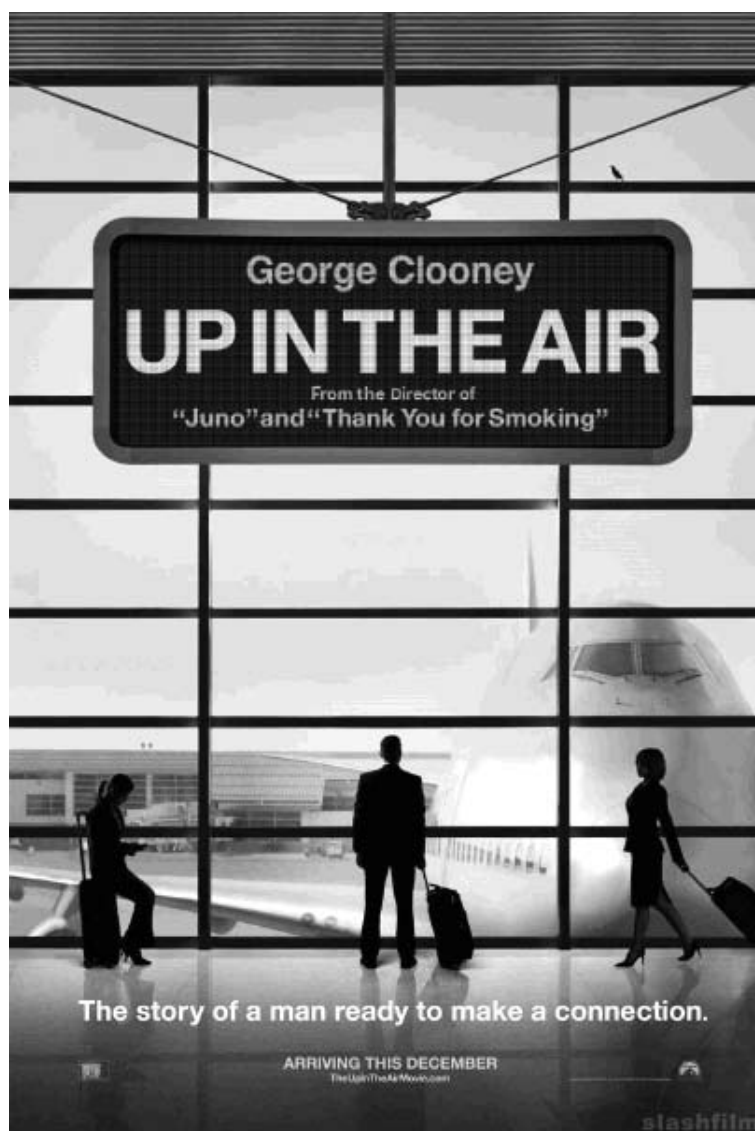
There are so many directions this movie could have dared to go; but, as the movie suggests is inevitable, instead it "settled." There is nothing about what we euphemistically called O&O, for "offshoring and outsourcing." Nothing about the macroeconomics driving the loss of jobs. Nothing about a culture that names its sports stadiums and college bowl games and research departments after corporations and how much its incipient corporate values

might be fornicating the way we interact with one another. Nothing about how one makes decisions about whom to lay off – in our case, we did what was expedient for the legal department, something calculated to limit lawsuits. Keep the best and get rid of the marginal? My ass.

By not even giving token lip service to any of these "human" issues, what you have left is a movie about a bunch of assholes rolling that boulder up the hill and watching it roll back down again – what in the hell is a poor asshole to do? Well, of course, it's make a commitment. That's the obvious lesson for the guy who lectures about the joys of an empty backpack, as well as the "salvation" for those jobless at the back bookend of the movie, who, instead of cussing, now speak of how they learned their family and friends are what's really important in life.

Commitment. Like Hilton Hotels and American Airlines committed to providing location shots for the movie in exchange for many, many placement ads. You see, the real message of the movie – besides that people who fly a lot are beautiful and have hot sex – is seen several times throughout the movie, usually on a large wall sign posted behind the characters as they mug through the empty dialogue:

American Airlines values your loyalty.



Yes, the movie pissed me off from the opening scene. Because it's completely false.

A Feast for Behavioral Health Services

Volunteers help agency fete mentally ill clients

By ANDREA PAUL-TAYLOR
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services (GCB) held its 11th annual Thanksgiving feast for clients Nov. 25, the first at its new location in East Walnut Hills.

About 350 clients enjoyed a holiday meal served by volunteers, including Cincinnati City Council members Roxanne Qualls, Laketa Cole and Cecil Thomas; Hamilton County Common Pleas Judge Pat DeWine; and U.S. Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Miami Township).

The feast was a traditional Thanksgiving meal with turkey, trimmings and pumpkin pie. But the new Welcome Center where the clients were served is somewhat smaller, and there was concern about possible space issues.

"We asked clients to come at two different seatings, noon and 1 p.m., in order to keep any delays to a minimum," says Kelly Smith-Trondle, access team supervisor for Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services. "For the most part, all went smoothly.

It worked better than we had even hoped."

The feast is a joint venture between GCB and IKRON, which provides employment services and counseling to mentally ill persons.

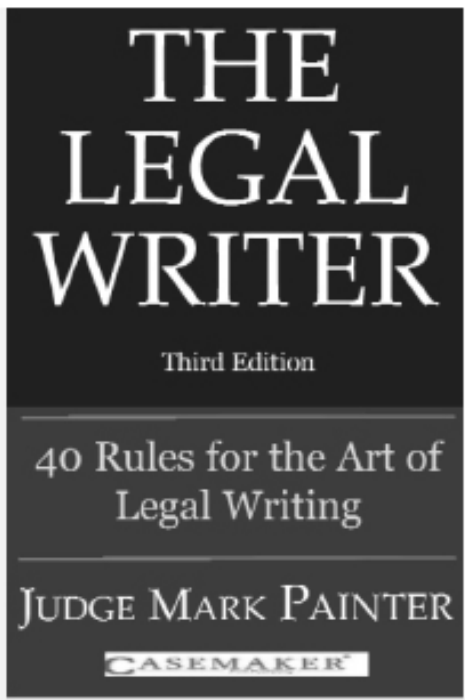
Each year staff and volunteers work together to prepare the meal with food provided by Frisch's and the Kroger Co. Girl Scout Troop 4444 from Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Westwood has volunteered since the feast was first established; many of the adult women who started as young scouts still come back to help out.

"It is important that our clients have somewhere meaningful to celebrate this holiday and that they don't have to be alone," says Tony Dattilo, CEO of GCB. "Many have been sharing Thanksgiving with us for years."

Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services is the most comprehensive mental-health agency in Hamilton County serving adults with severe mental illness. Its mission is to assist persons with mental illness to lead productive and fulfilling lives.



City Councilman Cecil Thomas was a volunteer server at a Thanksgiving feast. Photo courtesy of Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services.



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513.421.7803 x 12 or
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Go Ahead: Ask a Vendor

Invitation to a dialogue with our readers

Streetvibes vendors see a lot that you might not. For example, some can describe what goes on in an abandoned building at night when they sleep there.

Have you ever wondered what it's like to stand on a street corner selling newspapers? That's hardly a common occupation anymore.

How much money do *Streetvibes* vendors make – and what do they do with it? Do they have other jobs?

If you have questions, some of our vendors would like to answer them. "Go Ahead: Ask a Vendor" will be an occasional feature, with questions submitted by readers and answered by *Streetvibes* vendors.

You may direct your question to a specific vendor or we'll invite one to respond. Only include your name if you want to.

Send questions to streetvibes2@yahoo.com
Or to *Streetvibes*, 117 E. 12th St. Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.

Go ahead. Ask.

An ‘AHA!’ Moment in Cincinnati

Why should I join Affordable Housing Advocates?

By MICHELLE DILLINGHAM
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Affordable Housing Advocates (AHA) is a group of housing providers, advocates and consumers dedicated to the goal of ensuring good, safe, accessible, affordable housing for all people in Southwest Ohio.

Our focus is on meeting the housing needs of individuals and families with very low, low and moderate incomes. This group formed to share the expertise and information gathered by its members over decades of service to Greater Cincinnati in the area of affordable housing and to initiate and support plans of action that will further the creation, retention and accessibility of affordable housing in our community.

We are a diverse group of advocates, spanning the grassroots, faith-based development and planning communities.

As we enter into the 2010 Affordable Housing Advocates (AHA) Membership Drive, I ponder the question: What is advocacy, and why should we support it? When we say we “advocate,” what do we mean?

Let’s begin with the etymological meaning as my father instructed me, invoking the words of Charles Olsen: “Go to the root”. The word “advocate” is from the Latin, *advocatus*, for “one called to aid,” from ad (“to”) plus *vocare* (“to call”), related to *vocem* (“voice”). So, the root meaning of advocacy is a response to a call for help, providing a call to action and a voice.

What is intriguing about being a member of an advocacy group? For me it is the action. It is the purposeful transformation of injustice, anger and frustration into an argument for change. It is being part of a greater call to action. It is knowing I am part of meaningful change.

The most compelling thing about advocacy is (drum roll, please) it works. This was made ardently clear to me as I worked on the “other” side (the listening side) of advocacy working at City Hall. There is no greater influence on policy makers than a group of well prepared advocates

speaking on behalf of large numbers of constituents standing together.

But that is the very thing that challenges us, isn’t it? To take action takes time. There are so many causes to support that it can be overwhelming. I personally have at least four issues I am interested in and am on someone’s list. The volume of e-mails, newsletters and updates from just those four are many. By the time I scan through them all (inner thoughts: “Hmm, that article looks interesting. ... I should download and sign that petition. ... I should really go to that meeting and help testify.”), I could throw my mail in a pile, close the e-mail messages and turn on a mindless television show.

So much to fight for – but where to start? And I have to make dinner, do laundry, run the kids around (you fill in the blank). Can you relate?

One role of AHA as an advocacy organization is to help make your advocacy efficient and effective. A successful advocacy organization recognizes the challenges of its individual members and helps facilitate the group’s advocacy so that, as a whole, it is effectual and reaches the right ears.

The AHA Board will retreat in January to decide how to best fulfill its mission in 2010. We will contemplate how to focus our advocacy and prioritize our action agenda. Fortunately, the AHA Board is made up of members who together possess an impressive array of knowledge of the local housing landscape. Their leadership on affordable housing issues will help set the stage for our efforts for 2010.

Effective advocacy is an art – it is more than a group of individuals writing an e-mail to their elected officials. Organized advocacy typically starts with an action agenda that covers both incremental and fundamental goals. It identifies who has the greatest impact on policy decisions; it formulates the evidence, makes the case for policy change on multiple levels and holds policy-makers accountable. The broader the base of our individual membership, the better we can engage in organized advocacy.

I have always felt strongly about advocating for affordable housing. A few of my reasons include:

First, through the years working as a case manager in the field, the search for affordable, accessible, ad-

equate housing took up at least 75 percent of my time, even though it was not the primary intervention I was supposed to be offering (i.e., mental health, substance abuse, etc.).

Second, living in adequate housing is a basic need, fundamental to one’s well-being on all levels – mental, emotional, physical.

Third, affordable, accessible, and adequate housing is a social justice issue-there are real, systemic barriers to housing for people who make low to moderate incomes that need to be changed.

Advocacy is the act of pleading for, supporting or recommending; the act of advocating or speaking or writing in support of something.

Your membership dues will go to help implement our mission, which is “to initiate and support plans of action that will further the creation, retention and accessibility of affordable housing in our community.” Your dues will help fund the “pleading, supporting, and recommending” of affordable-housing policies.

But we are not only interested in the \$25 that comes with an individual membership. We look forward to your involvement in what you feel most compelled about related to housing. More than 25 percent of Cincinnatians live below the federal poverty line, and many more are barely living above it. We are in an economic recession of historic significance – at least 10 percent of us are not working; and the state of the economy has impacted the availability of affordable housing on multiple levels. Needless to say, there are many issues ahead of us that will require our advocacy.

Please consider joining AHA. Help us help you to be an effective housing advocate. Call me if you are interested in signing up at 513-602-4260, or e-mail me at mdmswls@hotmai.com.



Advocacy is the act of pleading for, supporting or recommending; the act of advocating or speaking or writing in support of something.

The Affordable Housing Advocates (AHA) envision the Cincinnati area as a place where all people have good, safe, accessible affordable housing. As the premier housing advocate in a region successfully meeting the needs of its people, AHA will serve as a model for like organizations across the nation. For more information visit www.ahacincy.org

An advocacy organization’s role is to help make your advocacy efficient and effective. A successful advocacy organization recognizes the challenges of its individual members and helps facilitate the group’s advocacy so that, as a whole, it is effectual and reaches the right ears.

Greater Cincinnati Coalition For The Homeless



Looking for the perfect gift for someone?

Why not give a donation to Streetvibes in a loved one’s name?

What about a Streetvibes subscription?

Streetvibes is the activist newspaper, advocating justice, building community. Your gift is tax-deductible and will go to producing the paper every two weeks. Started in 1997, Streetvibes is distributed by homeless and formerly homeless vendors who purchase the paper for 25 cents and sell it for \$1, keeping the 75 cent profit.

Make checks payable to “Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless”

I want to support Streetvibes and the vendors this holiday season.

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Please return your contribution to:

Name: _____

GCCH

Address: _____

117 E. 12th Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

E-mail: _____

Need Help or Want to Help?

<u>Shelter: Women and Children</u>			<u>Churches Active in Northside</u>			<u>Crossroad Health Center</u>		
Central Access Point			4230 Hamilton Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45223			5 E. Liberty St. Cinti, Ohio 45202		
Cincinnati Union Bethel			FreeStore/FoodBank			Health Resource Center		
300 Lytle Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			112 E. Liberty Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			Homeless Mobile Health Van		
Bethany House			Madisonville Ed & Assistance Center			McMicken Dental Clinic		
1841 Fairmount Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45214			3600 Erie Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45227			40 E. McMicken Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45202		
Grace Place Catholic Worker House			St. Vincent de Paul			Mental Health Access Point		
6037 Cary Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45224			1125 Bank Street, Cinti, Ohio 45214			Mercy Franciscan at St. John		
Salvation Army			<u>Treatment: Men</u>			1800 Logan St. Cinti, Ohio 45202		
131 E. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			Charlie's 3/4 House			NAMI of Hamilton County		
YWCA Battered Women's Shelter			2121 Vine Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			PATH Outreach		
			DIC Live In Program			<u>Other Resources</u>		
			Prospect House			Center Independent Living Options		
			682 Hawthorne Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45205			Emmanuel Community Center		
			Starting Over			1308 Race St. Cinti, Ohio 45202		
			<u>Treatment: Women</u>			Peaslee Neighborhood Center		
			First Step Home			214 E. 14th St. Cinti, Ohio 45202		
			2203 Fulton, Cinti, Ohio 45206			Franciscan Haircuts from the Heart		
			<u>Treatment: Both</u>			1800 Logan St. Cinti, Ohio 45202		
<u>Shelter: Men</u>			AA Hotline			Goodwill industries		
City Gospel Mission			CCAT			Healing Connections		
1419 Elm Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			830 Ezzard Charles Dr. Cinti, Ohio 45214			Mary Magdalen House		
Justice Watch			Joseph House (Veterans)			1223 Main St. Cinti, Ohio 45202		
St. Fran/St. Joe Catholic Work. House			1522 Republic Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			People Working Cooperatively		
1437 Walnut Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			Hamilton County ADAS Board			The Caring Place		
Mt. Airy Shelter			Recovery Health Access Center			United Way		
			Sober Living			Women Helping Women		
			Talbert House			<u>Hamilton/Middletown</u>		
<u>Shelter: Both</u>			<u>Advocacy</u>			St. Raephaels		
Anthony House (Youth)			Catholic Social Action			Salvation Army		
2728 Glendora Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45209			Community Action Agency			Serenity House Day Center		
Caracole (HIV/AIDS)			Contact Center			Open Door Pantry		
1821 Summit Road, Cinti, Ohio 45237			1227 Vine Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			<u>Northern Kentucky</u>		
Drop Inn Center			Franciscan JPIC			Brighton Center		
217 W. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			Gr. Cinti Coalition for the Homeless			799 Ann St. Newport, KY		
Interfaith Hospitality Network			117 E. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			ECHO/Hosea House		
Lighthouse Youth Center (Youth)			Intercommunity Justice & Peace Cr.			Fairhaven Resuce Mission		
3330 Jefferson, Cinti, Ohio 45220			Legal Aid Society			Homeward Bound Youth		
<u>Housing:</u>			Ohio Justice & Policy Center			Mathews House		
CMHA			Faces Without Places			Homeless & Housing Coalition		
Excel Development			Stop AIDS			Parish Kitchen		
OTR Community Housing			<u>Health</u>			Pike St. Clinic		
114 W. 14th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202			Center for Respite Care			Transitions, Inc		
Tender Mercies			3550 Washington Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45229			Welcome House of NKY		
27 W. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202						205 West Pike Street, Covington, KY 41011		
Tom Geiger House						Women's Crisis Center		
Dana Transitional Bridge Services						VA Domiciliary		
Volunteers of America						VA Homeless		
<u>Food/Clothing</u>								
Lord's Pantry								
OTR/Walnut Hills Kitchen & Pantry								
OTR: 1620 Vine Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202								
Walnut Hills: 2631 Gilbert, Cinti, Ohio 45206								
Our Daily Bread								
1730 Race Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202								
St. Francis Soup Kitchen								

Letter to the Editor

To the editor:

I want to thank you for your current article about the Lighthouse Youth Outreach Team (see "To Get Youth Off the Streets," issue of Dec. 1-14).

I must say, the quality of your articles is just outstanding. I have been reading *Streetvibes* for years, but over the last year or two I have noticed an unprecedented improvement in the quality and professionalism of your writers. So thank you for the terrific article and congratulations on putting out such a quality product.

Bob Mecum
President and CEO
Lighthouse Youth Services

Have something on your mind?
Let us know by sending a letter to:
117 E. 12th Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

streetvibes2@yahoo.com

A Call to Greater Cincinnati Poets

Write for 'For a Better World 2010'

It's time to get your verse on.

SOS Art, the annual exhibit of art on themes of peace and justice, publishes a collection of poetry each year. Saad Ghosn, who organizes SOS Art and writes the "Artists as Activists" column for *Streetvibes*, is now collecting submissions for *For a Better World 2010*, the seventh edition to date.

Any poet from or connected to Greater Cincinnati may submit up to three poems related to themes of peace and justice. All submissions will be considered. The editors will be looking for quality, inclusiveness and appropriateness to the themes of peace and justice.

If space becomes limited, priority will go to poets not published in previous books. The poems selected for publication will be illustrated in black and white by Greater Cincinnati artists. Poets included in the book will be invited to read their poems at SOS Art 2010.

For a Better World 2010 will be released in May 2010. The deadline for submissions is Feb. 15, 2010.

Send submissions as "Word" attachments or in full text
By e-mail to saad.ghosn@uc.edu or
On a CD to Saad Ghosn, 216 Erkenbrecher Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45229.

Compassion is a Natural Resource

Mary Ann Lederer promotes peace

Mary Ann Lederer's first use of art for political purposes was at age 20, during the civil rights movement, designing posters and picket signs. Influenced by the Rev. Maurice McCracken, whom she had met when volunteering at a neighborhood day camp, she actively participated in the desegregation campaign of the early 1960s. With others in the city who were trained in Gandhi's methods of non-violence – negotiations, picketing, occasionally sit-ins – she helped integrate Cincinnati's restaurants, stores and theatres.

Lederer grew up in North Avondale in a Jewish home surrounded by art and music. Her father was a Republican, her mother a Democrat; though fond of both, she sided politically with her liberal, more compassionate mother. She did not study art per se. In college, she took only one drawing course and majored in sociology. She worked for several years as a social worker, then returned to the University of Cincinnati (UC) to pursue a master's degree in community planning.

Not long after Lederer graduated, she was shot in the back by an intruder in her home. As a result, she became a paraplegic.

"When I woke up, I realized I could not move my legs any more," she says. "It felt like half my body was filled with cement; yet somehow I knew I wanted to paint."

Lederer

underwent rehabilitation, then became active in the disability movement. She set up a handicap program at UC and started a wheelchair basketball team. The team became the subject of several of her early paintings.

Other paintings addressed various disability issues. One, for instance,

showed two world-class wheel-chaired athletes wheeling across America to raise money for wheelchair sports. Others depicted a wheel-chaired Santa Claus and a wheel-chaired Cupid for Valentine's Day. Many represented disabled individuals in varied living activities. It was her way of raising awareness about their condition and identity.

As the years passed, Lederer developed health problems and was



Mary Ann Lederer. Photo by Bill Howes.

Artists as Activists

By SAAD GHOSN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



A Vegetable Garden in Every Yard, painting by Mary Ann Lederer. Photo by Mary Ann Lederer.

unable to continue arduous physical activity. An alternative vegetarian doctor, however, helped her heal by teaching her how to use food to turn her health around. As her health revived, she became active in Earthsave, an organization that promotes a plant-based diet for the health of individuals, a clean environment for the health of the earth and the compassionate treatment of animals. She has been active in the local chapter of Earthsave for many years, and its values have influenced her painting.

"I consider myself a philosopher-painter," Lederer says. "I paint the world I'd love to live in, a multi-ethnic world of freedom, equality and healthfulness, where the air is clean, water pure, plants wild or organically grown, animals free – a sustainable natural world."

Her painting, *An Intentional Community*, represents people in a vividly colored world of rivers, trees and animals; some people are gardening, some are coming together at a vegetable market. *A Peace Village* depicts ethnically diverse individuals living together in harmony with animals and the earth. *Bicycle City* shows a community with no cars – only bicycles, windmills, solar panels, a clean environment where people are able to communicate more closely with one another. It reflected her hopes for many such future communities.

Lederer started the painting, *A Vegetable Garden in Every Yard*, the day after the last presidential election and completed it on Inauguration Day. It shows the First Family on the White House lawn, which has been transformed into an idyllic community vegetable garden. It was her vision for a healthier, "back-to-the-earth" America. Posters of the painting are now available with the words, "A vegetable garden in every yard." She hopes it will encourage more people to grow their own food.

Lederer was pleased to learn that Michelle Obama has indeed recently started such a garden. She is convinced that what people eat affects not only their health but also their minds, their hearts and their behaviors, that a plant-based diet is preferable to one based on cruelty to animals, and that gardening and organic farming promote communication, community building and a healthy and peaceful society.

Lederer also uses her art to express her political views. Though aware of the violence in the world, she says, "We have an untapped natural resource in compassion. We need to nurture it. Our educational system unfortunately is more head than heart and prepares individuals to be competitive sometimes at the expense of a better world for everyone."

A recent painting about the Iraq War shows individuals of different ethnicities wearing different costumes, forming a circle, holding hands. *The Wall* shows Jews and Arabs working together for peace while writing in their own languages on the wall intended to divide them.

"My painting is a plea to the peoples of the world to appreciate each other's cultures and differences, to come together and communicate. Compassionate communication, for example, a system designed by Marshall Rosenberg, teaches people how to listen to each other and feel each others feelings. It works. We can get along with each other."

Lederer's dream is now to help start organic gardens all over the city, ensure compassionate treatment of animals, promote a vegan diet and pay respect to mother earth. Her art will continue to reflect her vision of a vibrant, natural, diverse and peaceful world.